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STATE SENATOR • 17TH SENATE DISTRICT

Capitol Update

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Choosing Among Public Schools: Open Enrollment in the 17th Senate District

Wisconsin families are currently in the midst of the public school open enrollment period for the 2016-2017 school year. This program has a major impact on the finances of many school districts in our communities by allowing families to choose among the public schools in their area.

The open enrollment program is an inter-district program that allows parents to enroll their children in a public school district other than the one in which they reside. First established for the 1998-99 school year, the open enrollment program allows any student from 4k to grade 12 to apply to a nonresident school district via an application process coordinated by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI).

Statewide, 53,188 students enrolled in public schools other than their resident school district during the 2014-2015 school year. This accounted for \$289.6 million transferred between public schools. In the 17th Senate District, 1,966 students enrolled in public school districts other than their resident district. As a result, approximately \$1.3 million was transferred to other public school districts.

During the application process, both the resident and nonresident school districts can deny the application for a student to open enroll based on a number of factors, including: availability of space in the school, the transferring student's disciplinary record, or student-teacher ratios. If the request is denied, there is an appeals process with the DPI, but the department is required to affirm the decision of the local district unless they find it was arbitrary or unreasonable.

If the student's application is accepted, the student is enrolled in the school of their choice, the resident school district transfers a set amount of funds to the chosen school district and the parents are responsible for transportation to and from school.

The open enrollment funding formula is where the major financial impact to school districts is realized.

On one hand, the resident school district does not lose the student in their count for enrollment numbers. **The pupil enrollment number is the largest factor that determines the size of a school district's budget.**

On the other hand, however, the resident district must transfer funds to the nonresident district for each student who is enrolled in another district during open enrollment. For the 2014-15 school year, the state determined amount was \$6,635 per student. The 2015-16 amount is \$6,639.

While the students and funds transferred to another district do not impact the amount of the overall school district's budget, it does impact the bottom-line of the school district's budget because they have to "cut-a-check" to another district for \$6,639 per student who transfers to another district.

For example, if a student resides in School District A but has successfully applied to attend School District B, School District A can count this student in its pupil membership for its revenue limit and general aid. However, School District A would then send \$6,639 to School District B for taking the additional student.

For School District A, the amount that needs to be transferred for each student to School District B is resources and funds they cannot spend in their own budget. In other words, the payment to School District B for taking these students is an expense for School District A. School District A cannot levy additional property taxes to make up the difference. School District B, which is receiving additional revenue, can use these resources outside of their revenue limit to increase their own budget.

DPI recently released a report of Open Enrollment Total Transfers In & Out of school districts for the 2014-15 school year. You will find data for all school districts in the 17th Senate District on my website as a part of my 2/26/16 E-Update.

It is important to note that every school has students transferring in and out of their district each year. As a result, the most important number to analyze is the net number of students involved in the open enrollment program for each school.

We have several schools that are accepting significant numbers of students through open enrollment, which increases the funds that these districts have each year. On the converse, however, these students are coming from other districts close-by, costing school districts significant dollars when a student enrolls elsewhere.

For example, the Ithaca School District had a net increase of 66 students which grew their student body by 20.7%. The Highland School district also experienced a net increase of 17 students or 6% and New Lisbon had a net increase of 52 students or 8.4%.

On the converse, the Argyle School District took 16 transfers in, but approved 44 transfers out for a net decrease of 8%. The Riverdale and Royall School Districts also experienced approximately -8% in net growth with 77 and 83 students enrolling in other districts, respectively.

There are many reasons parents cite for moving their student to another school district. Some families choose to enroll their child in another district for academic, athletic and geographic reasons. Others are seeking additional extra-curricular opportunities. Whatever the reasons may be, open enrollment may play a major part in the financial situation for a school district.

The regular open enrollment application period for the 2016-17 school year runs from February 1 until April 29, 2016. For more information and the application, please visit the DPI's website: <http://dpi.wi.gov/open-enrollment>.

For more information and to connect with me, visit my website <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/senate/17/marklein> and subscribe to my weekly E-Update by sending an email to Sen.Marklein@legis.wisconsin.gov. Do not hesitate to call 800-978-8008 if you have input, ideas or need assistance with any state-related matters.